

Stories Under Pressure

Trace how a community's history shapes voice, style, and meaning.

11.RL.3 "Integration of Concepts Explain the influence of the historical and cultural context on form, style, and point of view of texts that represent diverse voices and perspectives. Relate themes, patterns of events..."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show the narrator's historical or cultural context, circle one feature of the poem's style, and number two details that connect Anansi to the narrator's situation.

A Song for the Rent Party

- ① In 1926, I carried Mama's tin pan through Harlem, following the piano thump to Mrs. Bell's apartment. Families called these rent parties because a few coins at the door helped a neighbor pay the landlord. My parents had come north from Georgia during the Great Migration, hoping for steadier work, but the city still kept many doors shut. Inside, women in bright head wraps traded news while men cleared chairs for dancing. I felt the room pull tight around its worries, then loosen when the horn player lifted his instrument.
- ② Before I read my poem, Grandmother touched my sleeve. "Remember Anansi," she said, naming the clever spider from stories she had learned in Jamaica. In her version, Anansi survives by listening, tricking stronger foes, and sharing what he learns. I had never met a landlord who could be fooled by a rhyme, yet I understood her meaning. So I shaped my lines like call and response. I spoke a problem, and the room answered with a repeated promise: We are still here. The poem did not pretend Harlem was easy. It made our laughter sound like a plan.
- ③ When the horn paused, I looked at the faces around me: porters, seamstresses, cooks, and children crowded beside people who painted, wrote, or played music after work. Newspapers had begun calling this neighborhood a center of Black art, but I knew art was also a way to speak when other people described us as a problem. I ended with Grandmother's spider climbing a fire escape toward dawn. The image was not an escape from the city. It was a challenge to keep climbing together, using every story, beat, and voice we owned.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE Use the passage

- 1 How do the rent party's purpose and the community's economic struggles influence the mood and style of the narrator's poem?

- 2 How does the narrator's family history during the Great Migration shape the narrator's point of view about Harlem?

- 3 What pattern from the Anansi stories appears in the narrator's poem, and how is it adapted to the Harlem setting?

- 4 What attitude toward art does the narrator express? Explain how this attitude reflects the cultural context of Harlem in the passage.

3 YOUR TURN Your own words

Write 90 to 120 words about a contemporary poem, song, film, or drama you know. Name one myth, traditional story, or religious work it connects to, then explain how a historical, social, or cultural context shapes its form, style, or viewpoint.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show the narrator's historical or cultural context, circle one feature of the poem's style, and number two details that connect Anansi to the narrator's situation. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do the rent party's purpose and the community's economic struggles influence the mood and style of the narrator's poem?	Because the party helps a neighbor pay rent during a difficult time, the poem turns shared worries into a communal call-and-response promise. Its laughter and repeated response create a hopeful, collective mood.
2	How does the narrator's family history during the Great Migration shape the narrator's point of view about Harlem?	The narrator sees Harlem as a place of hope and community because the family came north seeking steadier work, but also as a place where discrimination still limits opportunities.
3	What pattern from the Anansi stories appears in the narrator's poem, and how is it adapted to the Harlem setting?	Anansi survives against stronger forces through cleverness and shared knowledge. The narrator adapts this pattern by presenting the community's stories, music, and collective action as ways to face hardship.
4	What attitude toward art does the narrator express? Explain how this attitude reflects the cultural context of Harlem in the passage.	The narrator sees art as a way for Black people to speak for themselves and resist harmful descriptions. This reflects Harlem as a center of Black artistic expression during the Harlem Renaissance.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Margaret Atwood's poem "Siren Song" reworks the Sirens episode from Homer's *Odyssey*. In the ancient epic, the Sirens lure sailors toward death with irresistible music. Atwood gives one Siren a conversational first-person voice, and she claims that singing is a boring job. The speaker's request for rescue becomes another trap, so the poem keeps the old pattern of temptation while making readers question the speaker's story. Written in 1974 amid second-wave feminist debates, the poem's ironic voice challenges the habit of treating women in myths as simple, dangerous symbols rather than complicated speakers.

Accept answers that use relevant passage evidence to connect context with form, style, point of view, or theme. For Part 3, accept varied texts and traditional sources if the student accurately explains both the connection and the contextual influence.